DARK HORSE COMICS
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#24
THE GOON
by Eric Powell
backup feature by the Fillbäch Brothers
Eric Powell '07

The nameless man, the zombie priest, had come to town to build a gang from the undead. But even the undead fear...

THE GOON™

by Eric Powell

colors by Dave Stewart

Hellbender

by the Fillbach Brothers

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I WAS LEADING A SMALL COMPANY OF SETTLERS WEST WHEN IT HAPPENED.

AMONG THESE TRAVELERS WERE MY BUSINESS PARTNER AND HIS WIFE.

MY PARTNER AND I HAD PLANNED TO OPEN A HOTEL IN ONE OF THE NEW BUSTLING TOWNS THAT WERE SPRINGING UP ON THE COAST.

I MYSELF WAS TRAVELING WITH MY WIFE AND YOUNG DAUGHTER.

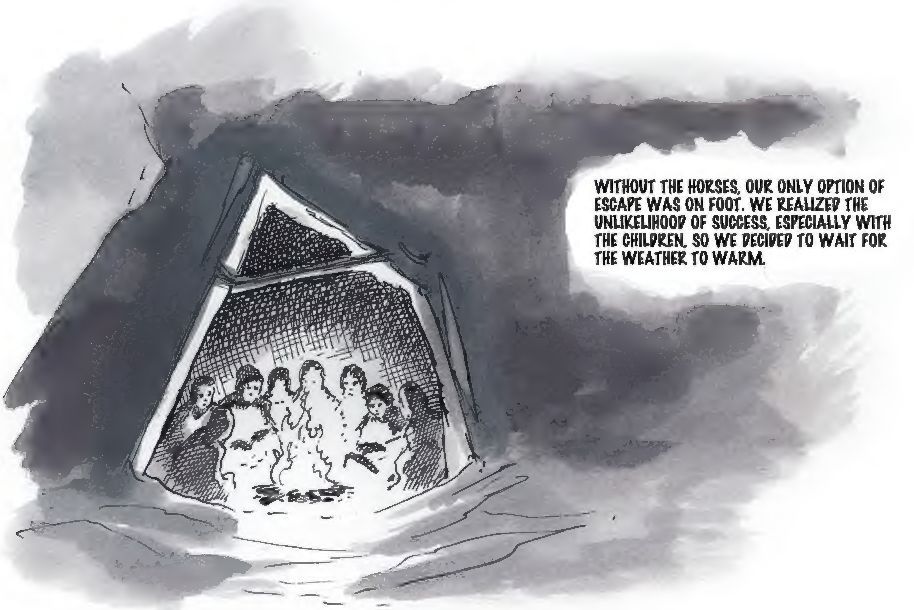
HOWEVER, MY ATTENTIONS WERE SECRETLY MORE FOCUSED ON MY PARTNER'S WIFE. WE HAD BEEN HAVING AN AFFAIR. HER BEAUTY WAS ONLY MATCHED BY HER INSENSITIVITY AND CRUELTY. SHE FOUND IT HUMOROUS TO SEDUCE HER HUSBAND'S PARTNER, AND MY RESPECT FOR MY FRIEND'S MARRIAGE WAS THROWN ASIDE DUE TO THE BLINDING LUST I FELT FOR THE WOMAN.
AN UNEASE CAME OVER ME AS WE ENTERED THE FOREST. AT FIRST I THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE OF MY INDISCRETIONS WITH MY FRIEND'S WIFE, BUT NOW I BELIEVE IT MAY HAVE BEEN SOMETHING ELSE.

THE SNOW FELL AND ACCUMULATED IN ONLY A FEW HOURS. AND IT KEPT COMING DOWN. RELENTLESSLY. THE ANIMALS COULD NO LONGER PULL THE WAGONS IN THE KNEE-DEEP DRIFTS. THE TARPS COVERING THE WAGONS WERE BEING RIPPED AND BLOWN ABOUT. WE TOOK SHELTER UNDER AN OVERHANGING ROCK FORMATION, AND CRUDELY THREW UP WHAT LUMBER WE COULD CUT DOWN INTO A ROUGH WALL TO BLOCK US FROM THE WIND.

THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR THE ANIMALS. THEY SUCCUMBED TO THE ELEMENTS QUICKLY.

THE STORM LASTED FOR SEVEN DAYS.

BY THE EIGHTH DAY, HALF OF THE PARTY ALREADY WERE SUFFERING FROM EXTREME FROSTBITE. BY THE NINTH, THREE WERE DEAD. WITH A SICKENING REALIZATION, I CONCEIVED I HAD BEGUN FANTASIZING ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF MY PARTNER, MY WIFE, AND CHILD BECOMING ILL AND DYING IN THIS FROZEN WILDERNESS, LEAVING ME ALONE TO PURSUE MY PARTNER'S WIFE. I DETESTED MYSELF FOR SUCH THOUGHTS, AND DROVE THEM FROM MY HEAD.

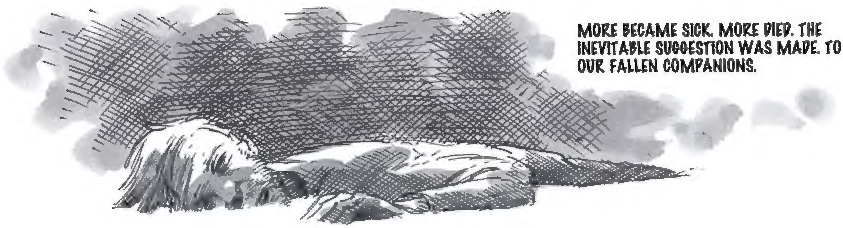

WITHOUT THE HORSES, OUR ONLY OPTION OF ESCAPE WAS ON FOOT. WE REALIZED THE UNLIKELIHOOD OF SUCCESS, ESPECIALLY WITH THE CHILDREN, SO WE DECIDED TO WAIT FOR THE WEATHER TO WARM.

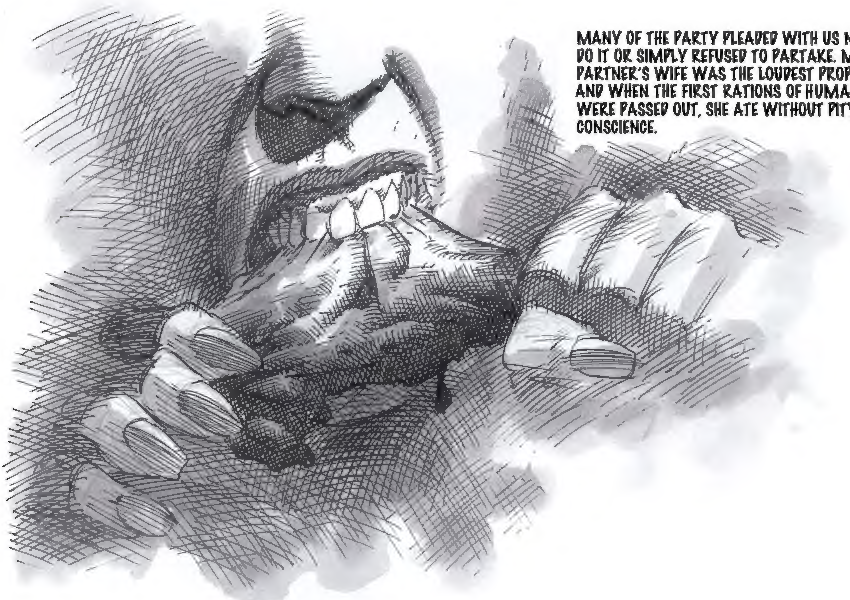
WE WAITED IN VAIN. THE COLD BIT UPON US RELENTLESSLY.
ONE MAN, EITHER BRAVE OR SIMPLY GIVING UP, DECIDED TO SET OUT ON HIS OWN TO TRY TO BRING BACK HELP. HE WAS NEVER SEEN AGAIN.
SOME HELD OUT FOR THE MAN TO RETURN. SEARCHING THE TREES. WAITING FOR HIM TO COME WALKING OVER A DRIFT WITH RESCUE IN TOW. DAY AFTER DAY THEY LOOKED FOR HIM.

THE MORE REALISTIC AMONG US STARTED BUTCHERING THE FROZEN HORSES.

THEY SUSTAINED US FOR QUITE SOME TIME. THE TASTE OF HORSE FLESH BECAME WELL KNOWN TO US. IT WAS OUR EVERY MEAL.

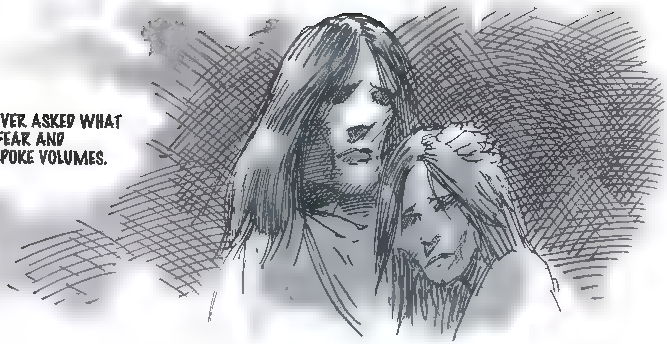
BUT EVEN THAT BEGAN TO RUN LOW AS THE COLD AND SNOW CONTINUED TO THWART OUR HOPES.


MORE BECAME SICK. MORE DIED. THE INEVITABLE SUGGESTION WAS MADE. TO EAT OUR FALLEN COMPANIONS.


MANY OF THE PARTY PLEADED WITH US NOT TO DO IT OR SIMPLY REFUSED TO PARTAKE. MY PARTNER'S WIFE WAS THE LOUDEST PROPONENT. AND WHEN THE FIRST RATIONS OF HUMAN FLESH WERE PASSED OUT, SHE ATE WITHOUT PITY OR CONSCIENCE.

I WAS IN CHARGE OF THE RATIONING. MY PARTNER'S WIFE USED MY FEELINGS FOR HER TO MAKE SURE SHE WAS WELL TAKEN CARE OF. I GAVE HER MORE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE REST. EVEN MY WIFE AND CHILD.

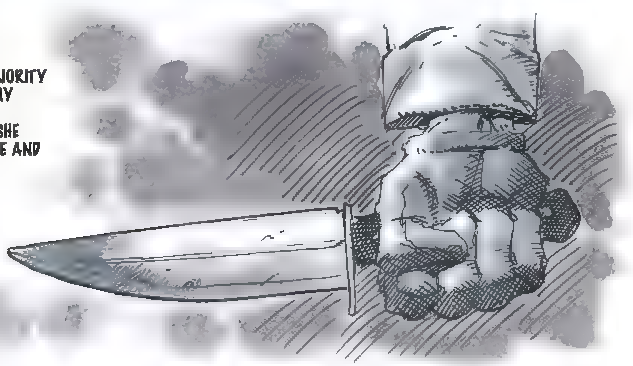
EVERY TIME THE FOOD BEGAN TO RUN LOW, ANOTHER WOULD DIE, AND THEN THERE WOULD BE FOOD FOR A LITTLE LONGER. IT WAS A CRUEL CYCLE. IRONICALLY, EVERYONE DIED BUT MY FAMILY AND MY PARTNER AND HIS WIFE. IT WAS AS IF IT WERE MEANT TO BE WE FIVE LEFT AT THE END. OR MAYBE IT WAS BECAUSE OF MY RATIONING.
THE SEDUCTRESS WARPED MY MIND. SHE SAID THE ONLY HOPE FOR US WAS TO MURDER THE OTHERS AND USE THEM TO STRENGTHEN US FOR AN ESCAPE.
AT FIRST I TRIED TO JUSTIFY WHAT I HAD PLANNED. MY PARTNER WAS THE ONLY MAN LEFT. HE HAD NO CHILDREN. I HAD A FAMILY. IT WAS EASILY JUSTIFIED.
I LURED HIM AWAY FROM THE WOMEN WITH THE EXCUSE OF SEARCHING FOR SOME FOOD.



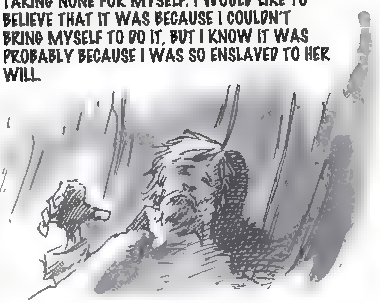
MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER NEVER ASKED WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM, BUT THE FEAR AND ACCUSATION IN THEIR EYES SPOKE VOLUMES.

MY GUILT, THEIR UNSPOKEN CONTEMPT, AND THE POISON TONGUE OF THE SEDUCTRESS TURNED MY FRAGILE MIND AGAINST MY FAMILY FAR BEFORE THE FLESH OF MY PARTNER HAD EVEN RUN OUT.

I WAS BECOMING THAT EVIL WOMAN'S MINDLESS ANIMAL, GIVING HER THE MAJORITY OF THE FOOD EVEN AT THE EXPENSE OF MY OWN HEALTH. I WAS WASTING AWAY PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY. SO WHEN SHE ASKED ME TO TAKE THE LIFE OF MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER, I DID SO WITHOUT THOUGHT.



I FED THAT SOULLESS WOMAN THE FLESH OF MY FAMILY. MAINTAINING HER STRENGTH, BUT TAKING NONE FOR MYSELF. I WOULD LIKE TO BELIEVE THAT IT WAS BECAUSE I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO DO IT. BUT I KNOW IT WAS PROBABLY BECAUSE I WAS SO ENSLAVED TO HER WILL.



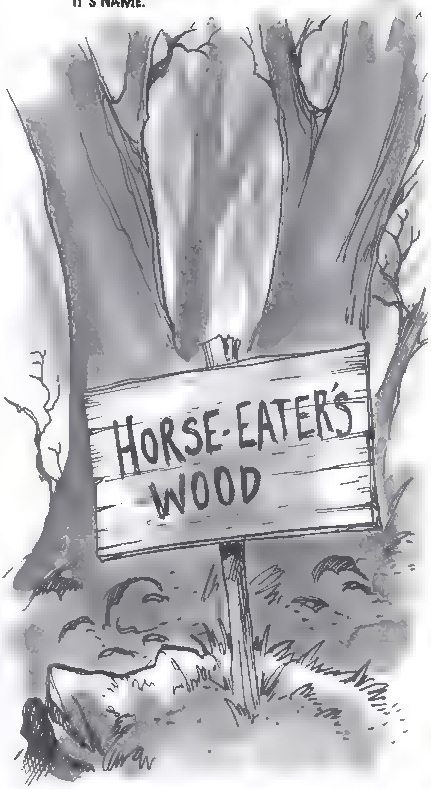
AND SO IN THE END SHE AND I WERE ALONE WHEN THE THAW CAME. I WAS TOO WEAK TO EVEN MOVE.

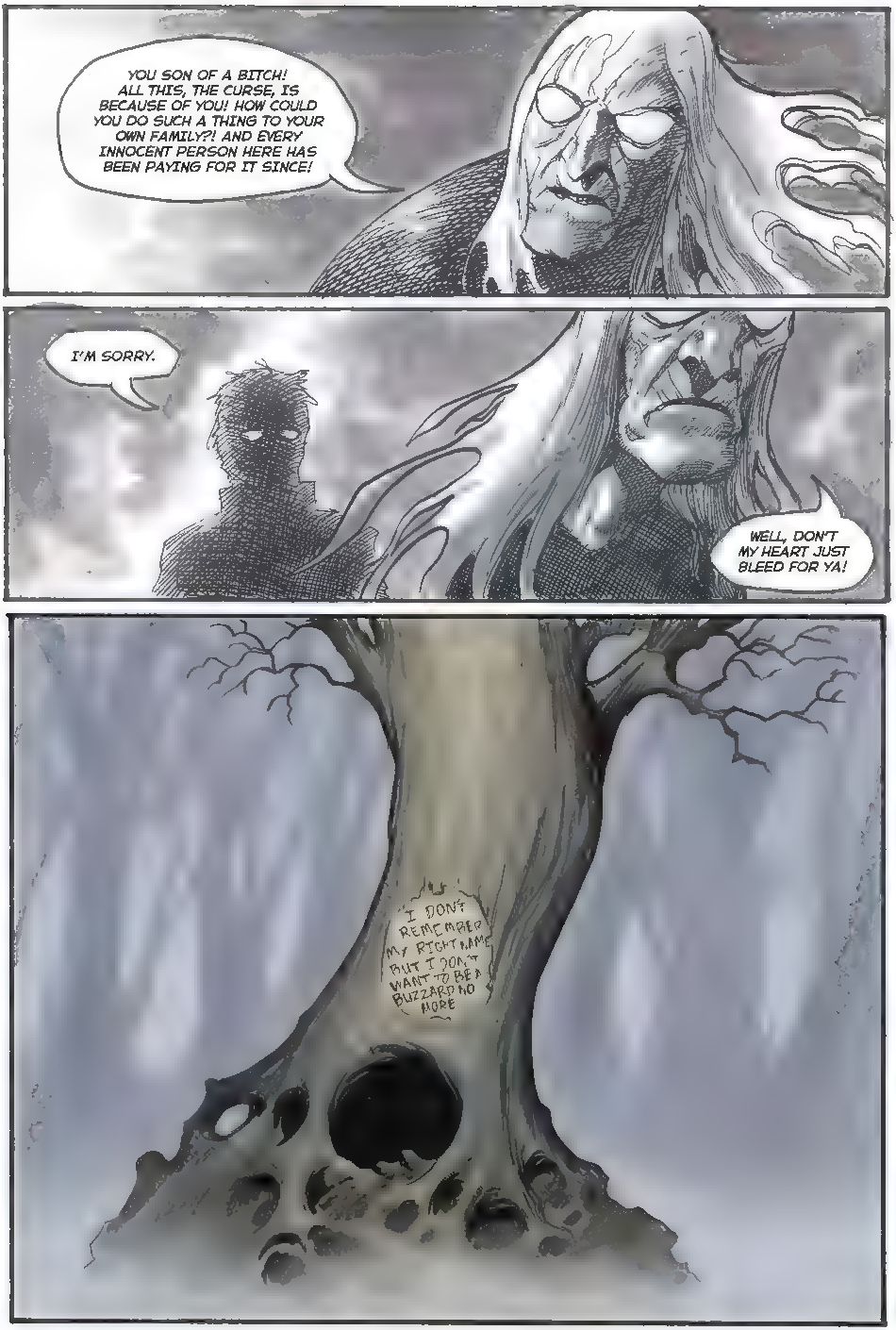
I BEGGED HER TO HELP ME. TO NOT LEAVE ME ALONE. SHE MERELY MOCKED ME.

AS I LAY ON THE GROUND WASTING AWAY, AND HEARING HER FADING LAUGHTER, MY SINS, REGRET, AND ANGER TURNED INTO A BLACK HATRED GROWING IN MY SOUL. I SPIT OUT A CURSE FROM MY CRACKED LIPS, AND AS I SLIPPED INTO DEATH, THE HATRED FLOWED OUT OF MY SOUL AND SEEPED INTO THE FOREST AROUND ME. IT BECAME THE CURSE THAT PLAGUES THE TOWN AT THE EDGE OF THIS FOREST.

MY SPIRIT WAS CLAIMED BY THIS PLACE, AND IS FOREVER BOUND UP WITH THE CURSE. I'VE WATCHED THE EVIL FROM MY HAND SPREAD AND PERMEATE EVERYTHING. IT DREW BLACK SPIRITS THAT ENDLESSLY TORMENT ME. I SEE THE MISERY I HAVE CAUSED. THE NEVER-ENDING MISERY. AND I KNOW I AM IN HELL.

THE SEDUCTRESS MADE IT OUT ALIVE. SHE WAS FOUND BY SOME TRAPPERS, AND SERIALIZED HER STORY IN A SERIES OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES. OF COURSE SHE CHANGED THE FACTS, MAKING ALL OF US OUT TO BE MURDERING, CANNIBAL HEATHENS, WHILE SHE CLAIMED TO HAVE MADE IT OUT ALIVE WITHOUT PARTAKING OF HUMAN FLESH BY DIVINE INTERVENTION. IT WAS FROM HER STORY THAT THIS PLACE GOT IT'S NAME.

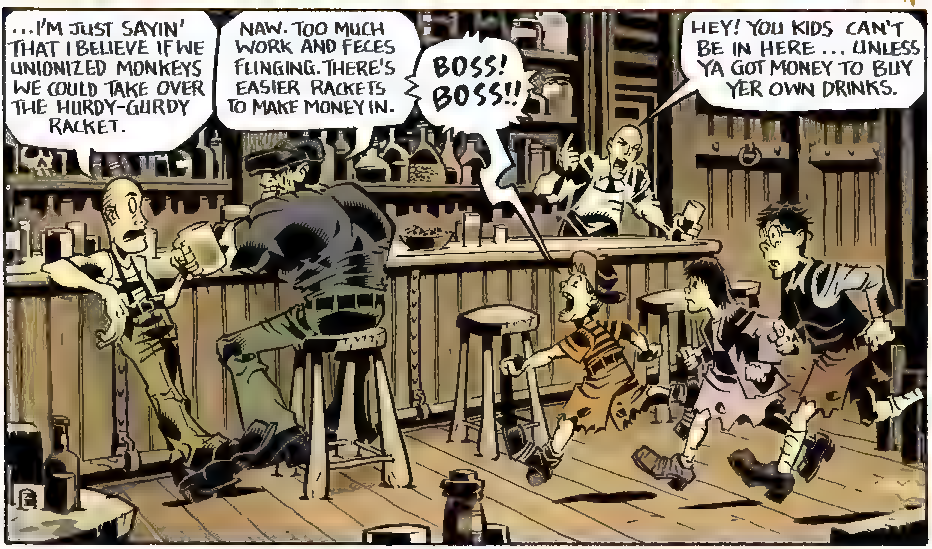


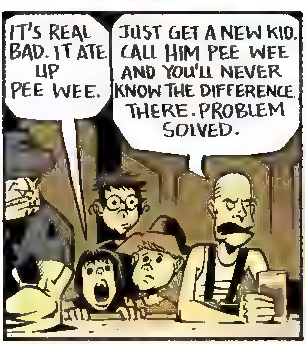

YOU SON OF A BITCH! ALL THIS, THE CURSE, IS BECAUSE OF YOU! HOW COULD YOU DO SUCH A THING TO YOUR OWN FAMILY?! AND EVERY INNOCENT PERSON HERE HAS BEEN PAYING FOR IT SINCE!
I'M SORRY.
WELL, DON'T MY HEART JUST BLEED FOR YA!
I DON'T REMEMBER MY RIGHT NAME BUT I DON'T WANT TO BE A BUZZARD NO MORE

BUZZARD! I GUESS I SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED. YOU PICK THE BEST OF TIMES TO STICK YER NOSE INTO THINGS. WHERE YOU BEEN?
BOY, WE NEED TO TALK.

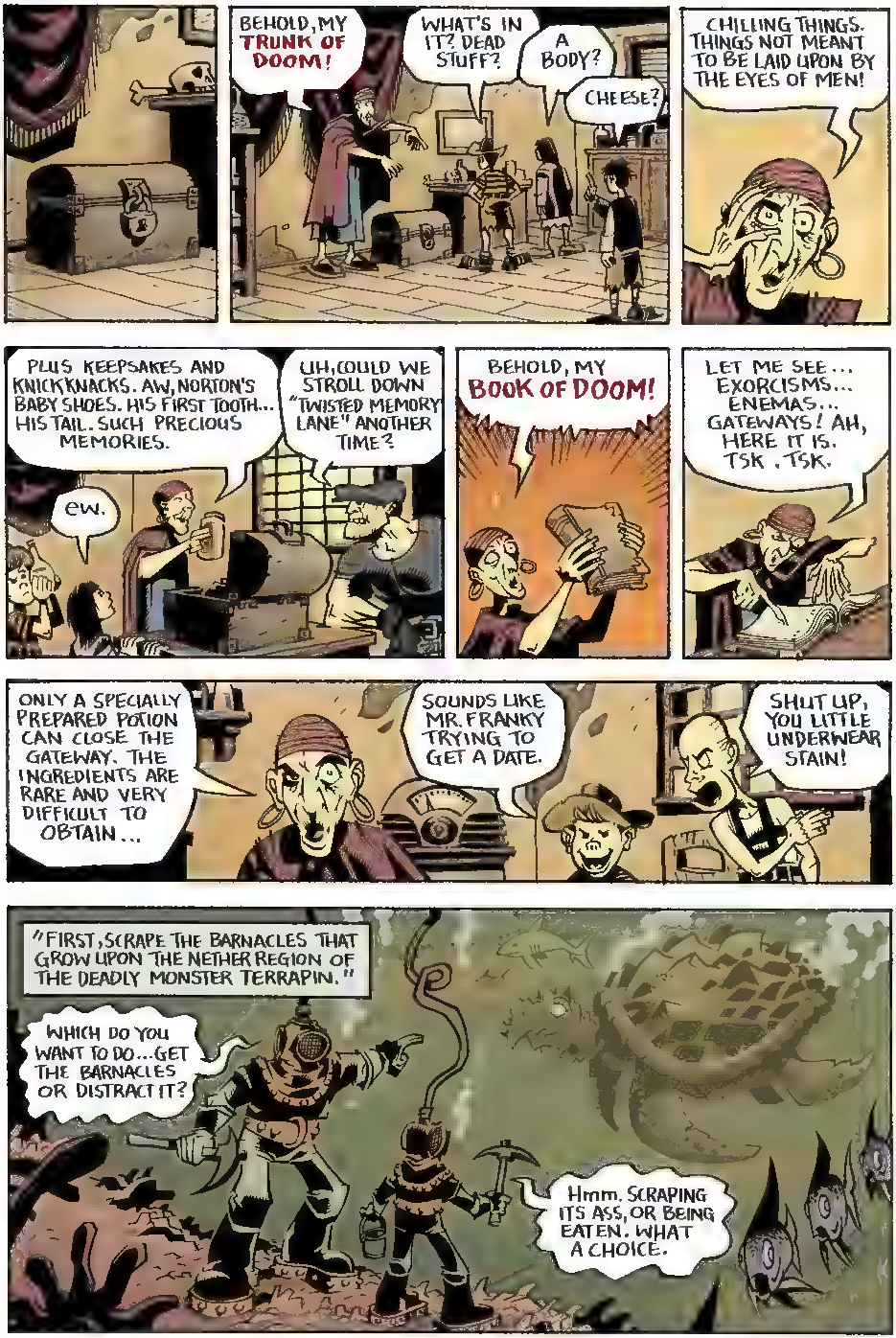
THE GOON IN: HELLBENDER

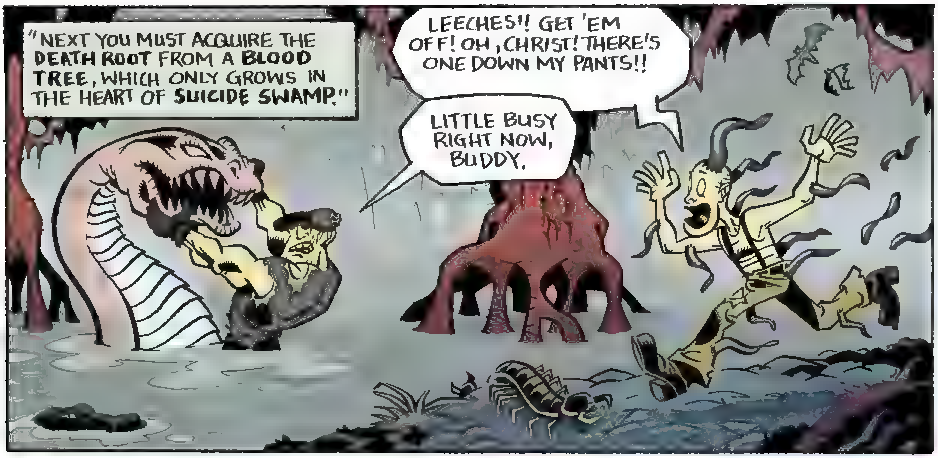
WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY THE EISNER AWARD



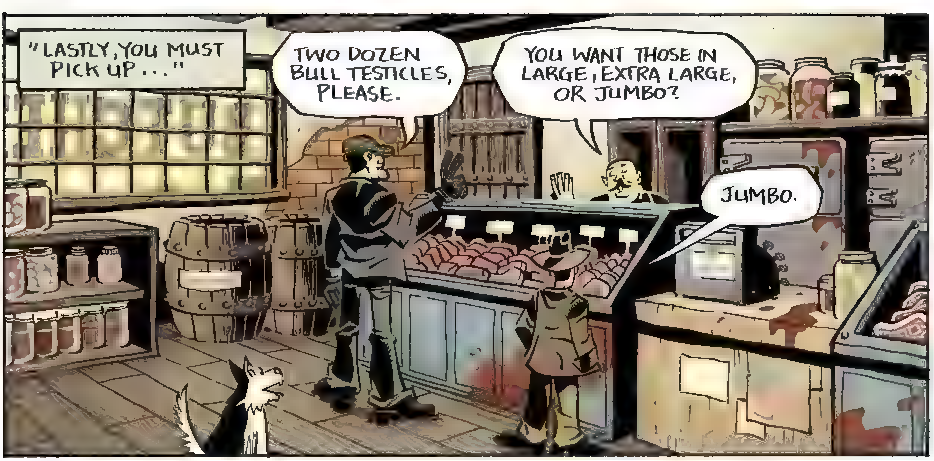


THE END IS NEAR
FLAMES. DESTRUCTION. APOCALYPTIC DAMNATION. YEP, GATEWAY TO HELL, ALL RIGHT.
IT'S LIKE A GIANT FLAMING TOILET BOWL.
EW, IT SMELLS LIKE RAW EGGS AND ASS.
THAT WHICH YOU SMELL IS THE SMELL OF...
THE DAMNED!!
YEAH, WELL THE DAMNED COULD SURE USE A BATH AND A BREATH MINT, WHEW! IT MAKES PEACHES VALENTINE SMELL LIKE A $500 HOOKER.
HOOKA! HOOKA!! NNNN
SO, YOU HERE TO HELP OR ARE YOU JUST GONNA ACT CREEPY AND TALK CRAZY AGAIN, MOMMA NORTON?
COME, THERE MAY BE A WAY TO CLOSE THE GATEWAY BEFORE IT CONSUMES US ALL! BUT THERE IS NOT MUCH TIME... IT'S MY BINGO NIGHT.

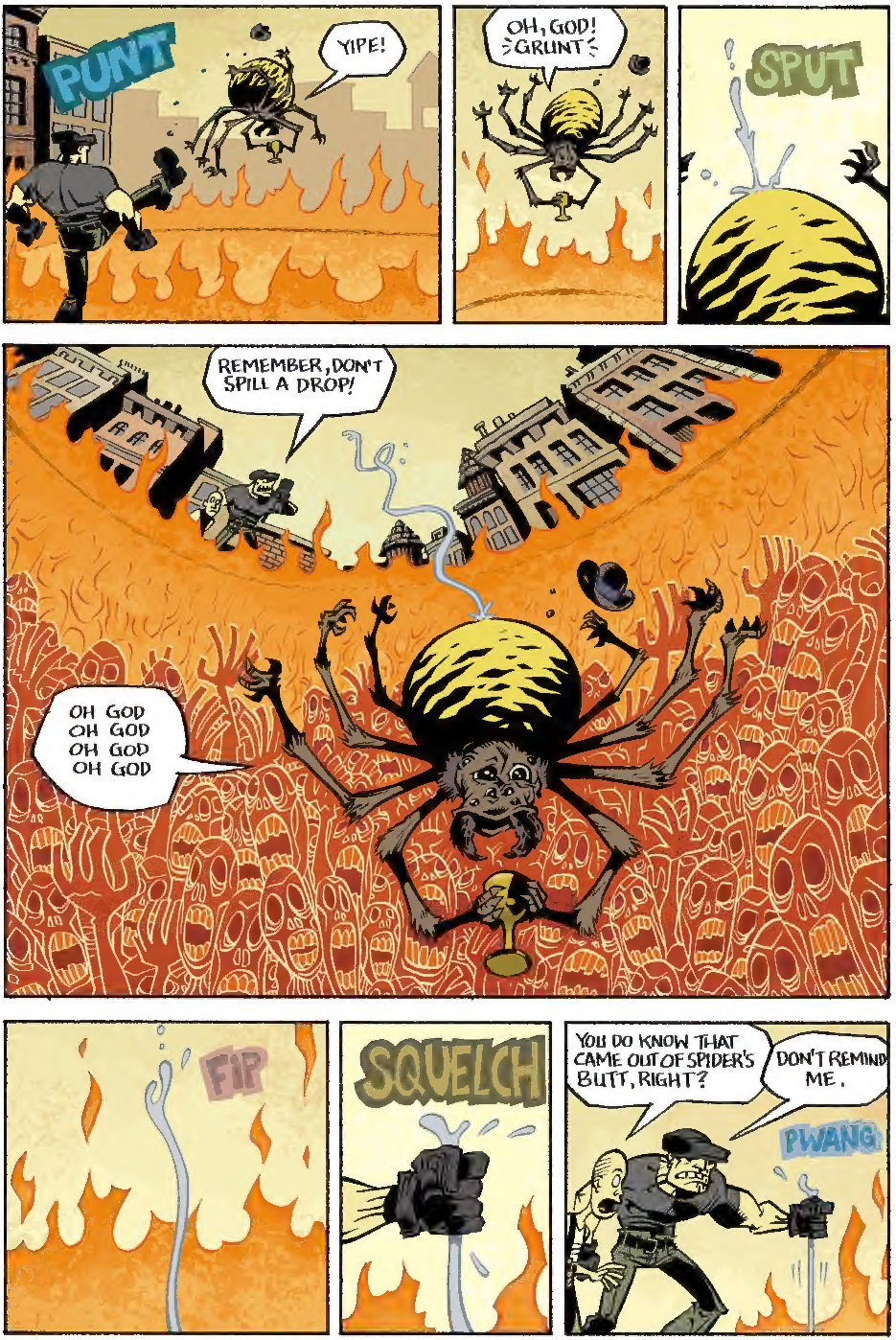

BEHOLD, MY TRUNK OF DOOM!
WHAT'S IN IT? DEAD STUFF?
A BODY?
CHEESE?
CHILLING THINGS. THINGS NOT MEANT TO BE LAID UPON BY THE EYES OF MEN!
PLUS KEEPSAKES AND KNICKKNACKS. AW, NORTON'S BABY SHOES. HIS FIRST TOOTH... HIS TAIL. SUCH PRECIOUS MEMORIES.
UH, COULD WE STROLL DOWN "TWISTED MEMORY LANE" ANOTHER TIME?
EW.
BEHOLD, MY BOOK OF DOOM!
LET ME SEE... EXORCISMS... ENEMAS... GATEWAYS! AH, HERE IT IS. TSK. TSK.
ONLY A SPECIALLY PREPARED POTION CAN CLOSE THE GATEWAY. THE INGREDIENTS ARE RARE AND VERY DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN...
SOUNDS LIKE MR. FRANKY TRYING TO GET A DATE.
SHUT UP, YOU LITTLE UNDERWEAR STAIN!
"FIRST, SCRAPE THE BARNACLES THAT GROW UPON THE NETHER REGION OF THE DEADLY MONSTER TERRAPIN."
WHICH DO YOU WANT TO DO... GET THE BARNACLES OR DISTRACT IT?
Hmm. SCRAPING ITS ASS, OR BEING EATEN. WHAT A CHOICE.


"NEXT YOU MUST ACQUIRE THE DEATH ROOT FROM A BLOOD TREE, WHICH ONLY GROWS IN THE HEART OF SUICIDE SWAMP."
LEECHES!! GET 'EM OFF! OH, CHRIST! THERE'S ONE DOWN MY PANTS!!
LITTLE BUSY RIGHT NOW, BUDDY.

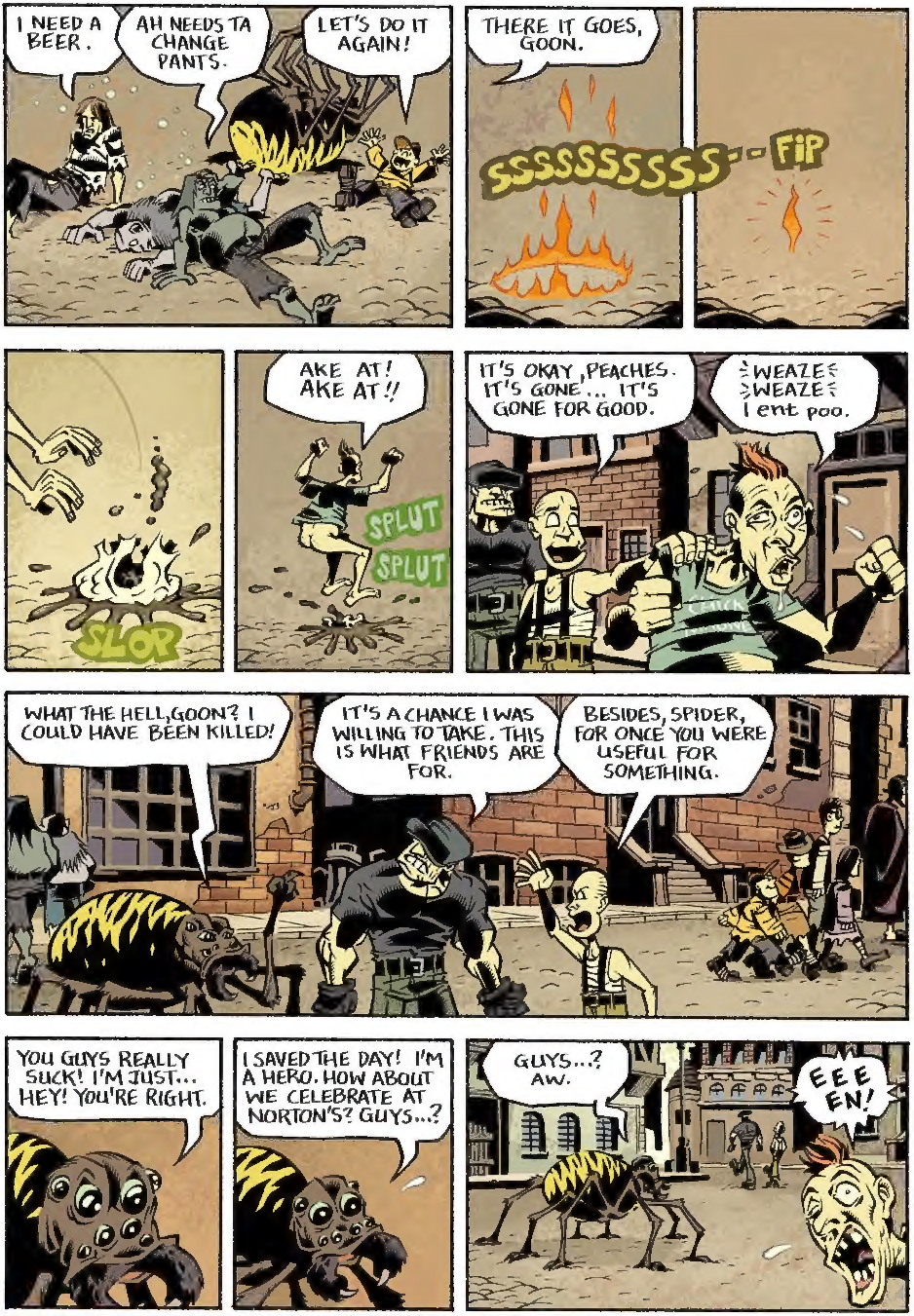
"THEN FETCH THE SHRIVELED, BLACK HEART FROM THE CORPSE OF A TRULY EVIL MAN."
YA EVER NOTICE IT ALWAYS ENDS UP WITH US HAVING TO DESECRATE GRAVES AND MUTILATE CORPSES IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT?
SHUT UP AND HAND ME THE SAW.
BINKY THE CLOWN
FEARED BY MILLIONS LOVED BY NONE


"LASTLY, YOU MUST PICK UP..."
TWO DOZEN BULL TESTICLES, PLEASE.
YOU WANT THOSE IN LARGE, EXTRA LARGE, OR JUMBO?
JUMBO.

PLOP
STIR
SIP
YES! THE POTION IS PREPARED.
HEY, WHAT THE HELL WERE THE BULL NUTS FOR ANYWAY?
LUNCH!
HOLY CRAP, FELLAS, YA BETTER HURRY. THE GATEWAY'S ALMOST AT THE FRONT DOOR!
WITH THE POTION POURED IN THIS CHALICE OF DOOM THE GATEWAY CAN BE CLOSED...
IT MUST BE PLACED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HELLPIT. BUT BE WARNED, IF ONE DROP SPILLS THE GATEWAY WILL REMAIN FOREVER OPEN.
WHY NOT USE A THERMOS?
OR A BOTTLE?
I DON'T MAKE THE RULES! SO JUST SHUT UP.
HEY, GUYS, WHAT'S UP? STILL TRYING TO CLOSE THAT GATEWAY TO HELL, HUH?
SPIDER, HOLD THIS WOULD YA? AND WHATEVER YOU DO DON'T SPILL A DROP OR I'LL KILL YOU.
OOOKAY, I GUESS... WHAT IS IT? IT SMELLS WEIRD--


PUNT
YIPE!
OH, GOD!
GRUNT
SPUT
REMEMBER, DON'T SPILL A DROP!
OH GOD
OH GOD
OH GOD
OH GOD
FIP
SQUELCH
YOU DO KNOW THAT CAME OUT OF SPIDER'S BUTT, RIGHT?
DON'T REMIND ME.
PWANG

WANG!
OH, THANK GOD.
TUNK
WHEW! AND NOT A DROP SPILLED.
HMM... SO THIS IS HELL, EH? I'VE SEEN WORSE.
OH, HEY, GUYS. WHAT'S UP?
LOOK, IT'S SPIDER!
HE COME TO SAVE US FROM PIT OF HELL.
WHOA! OUCH!! GET OFF ME!
GIMME A RIDE! GIMME A RIDE!
CHECK IT OUT, GOON. LOOKS LIKE THE RETARD DID IT. THE GATEWAY'S CLOSING.
HEAVE HO!
FUMP



IN MEMORANDUM · MOMMA NORTON · R.I.P.

EMPIRE